

2020

Open Streets and Sidewalks - Slides

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Open Streets and Sidewalks

*The Impact of COVID-19 on the Streetscapes of Today's Cities
and the Promise of Social Infrastructure*

SUSTCOMM 597P | “PERIL and PROMISE” | Urban Planning and Design Implications of COVID-19

Fall 2020 | Tuesday, October 6, 2020

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Today: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Streetscapes of Today's Cities and the Promise of Social Infrastructure



Theory:

What is social infrastructure?

Examples

Research:

How to study social infrastructure during the pandemic?

Experiences

Case Study:

How does this (not) work in practice?

Northampton, MA

Social Infrastructure

Theory:

What is social infrastructure?

Examples



What is a streetscape? (Rehan 2013)

- the natural and built fabric of the street
- its design qualities, visual effect
- how the paved area is laid out and **treated**
- includes buildings, the street surface, and also the fixtures and fittings that facilitate its use – from bus shelters and signage to planting schemes

Purpose? (Hui et al. 2018)

- circulating different forms of transit
- mitigating adverse environmental impacts
- serving as a place of destinations



Fig. 3. An illustration of sidewalk and street focal areas.



Social Infrastructure

Definition: *physical* and *institutional* networks crucial for the development and maintenance of social connections (Laytham and Layton 2019)

physical **place** of material design that facilitates and shapes activity; “gatekeeper” to create affordance for connection

institutional **practices** or **customs** that instill trust and belonging across difference (political, economic, or cultural groups); “gatekeeper” for curating a (positive) experience and actively inviting anyone into public realm



Properties of infrastructure (Star 1999)

1. embedded: within familiar networks
2. reach/ scope: intended for repeated use
3. learned with membership: norms revealed with use
4. embodied standards: drawn from existing systems
5. installed base: exists within other provisioning structures
6. transparent: unnoticed while in use *
7. visible upon breakdown: *until dysfunctional
8. fixed in modular increments: can only change in stages

Example: Properties of a **15-minute neighborhood (near TOD district)**

physical infrastructure: houses, apartments, stores, parks, roads, sidewalks
institutional infrastructure: families, friends, neighbors
social infrastructure: using a bike lane for commuting and recreation, chatting with neighbors over a fence



1. embedded: within familiar networks	transit network, building density
2. reach/ scope: intended for repeated use	intersections, parking lots
3. learned with membership: norms revealed with use	salutations or silence
4. embodied standards: drawn from existing systems	mixed use/ TOD (walking, biking)
5. installed base: exists within other provisioning structures	local, state, federal administration
6. transparent: unnoticed while in use *	sidewalks
7. visible upon breakdown: * until dysfunctional	vehicle-pedestrian crashes
8. fixed in modular increments: can only change in stages	housing stock, material infrastructure upgrades



Social Infrastructure

Definition: *physical* and *institutional* networks crucial for the development and maintenance of social connections (Laytham and Layton 2019)

- Permits people to gather without barriers
- Provides a welcoming atmosphere for interaction and support
- Offers different uses for different groups of people

Matching **physical infrastructure** with the way a place is **experienced**

Places (land use) of social infrastructure:

- Transportation *Commuting by bike on a rail trail.*
- Commerce *Seeing regulars at a bagel shop.*
- Open space, sport/ recreation *Joining a Parks/Rec event at the park.*
- Arts and culture *Volunteering at a museum.*
- Civic *Using a library to access the internet*
- Education *Participating in after-school clubs.*
- Religion *Attending choir practice.*



Social Infrastructure Research

partners UMass LARP (Michael), WalkBoston, MassINC

research questions

1. What is the social infrastructure of MA Gateway City TOD districts?
 - physical infrastructure, land use
 - programming, organizational density
2. What elements of social infrastructure effectively build local resilience?
3. What policies, programs, and projects can boost resiliency and shape them as 15-minute city zones?

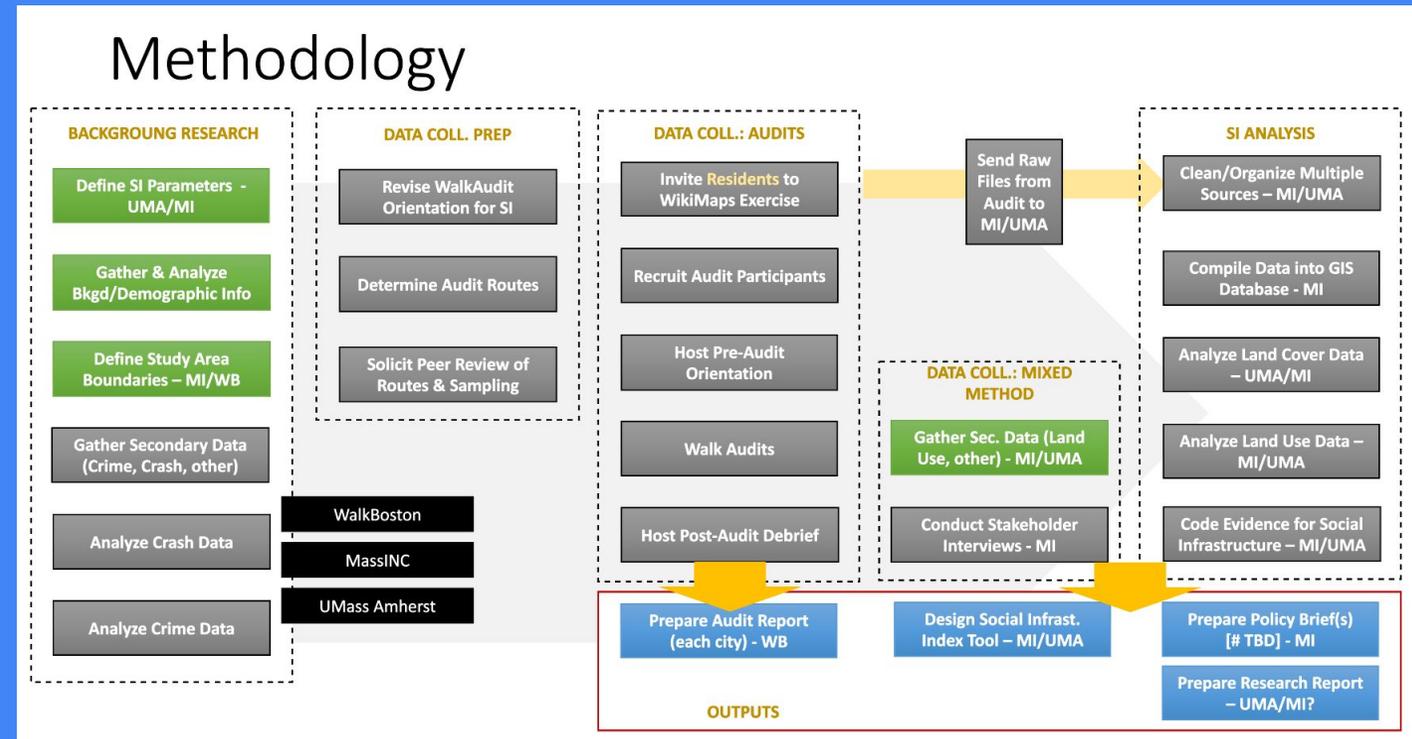
how do you measure social infrastructure?

Quantitative: amount, diversity, distribution

- US Census data - who lives and works near TOD districts?
- land use data - how close are essential services?
- transportation data - where are the sidewalks?
- organizational data - where is public programming provided?
- safety data - what is the risk of personal harm?

Qualitative: quality, condition

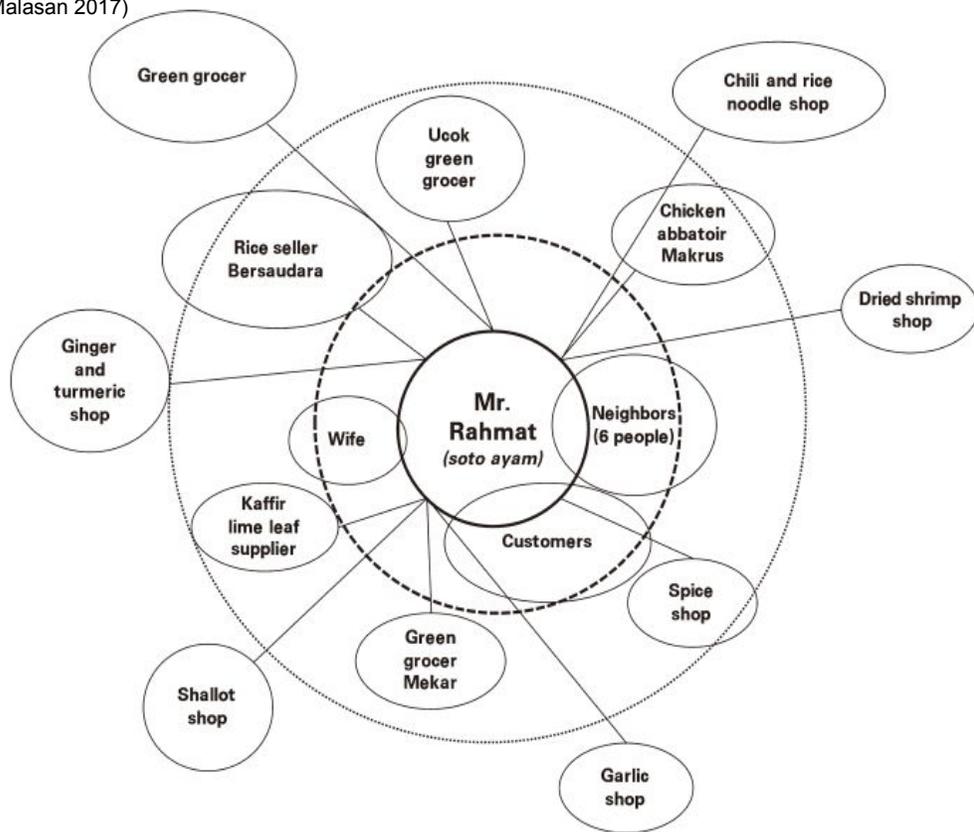
- walk audit - where do residents feel safe and unsafe walking?
- stakeholder interviews - what's a priority? when and how can changes happen?
- city plans - what has been on the community's radar?





Question

Example of social infrastructure (places and relationships) for Mr. Rahmat, a street food vendor (Malasan 2017)



What was the social infrastructure you created or used in the neighborhood where you grew up?

How does that compare with the social infrastructure you use now?

How does social infrastructure change for different groups of people, based on:

- demographic characteristics (age, gender, race, place of birth)
- socioeconomic status (housing type, income, education)
- personal preferences (sports, nature, film, food)

How has social infrastructure changed during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Social Infrastructure

Real-Time Research

Theory:

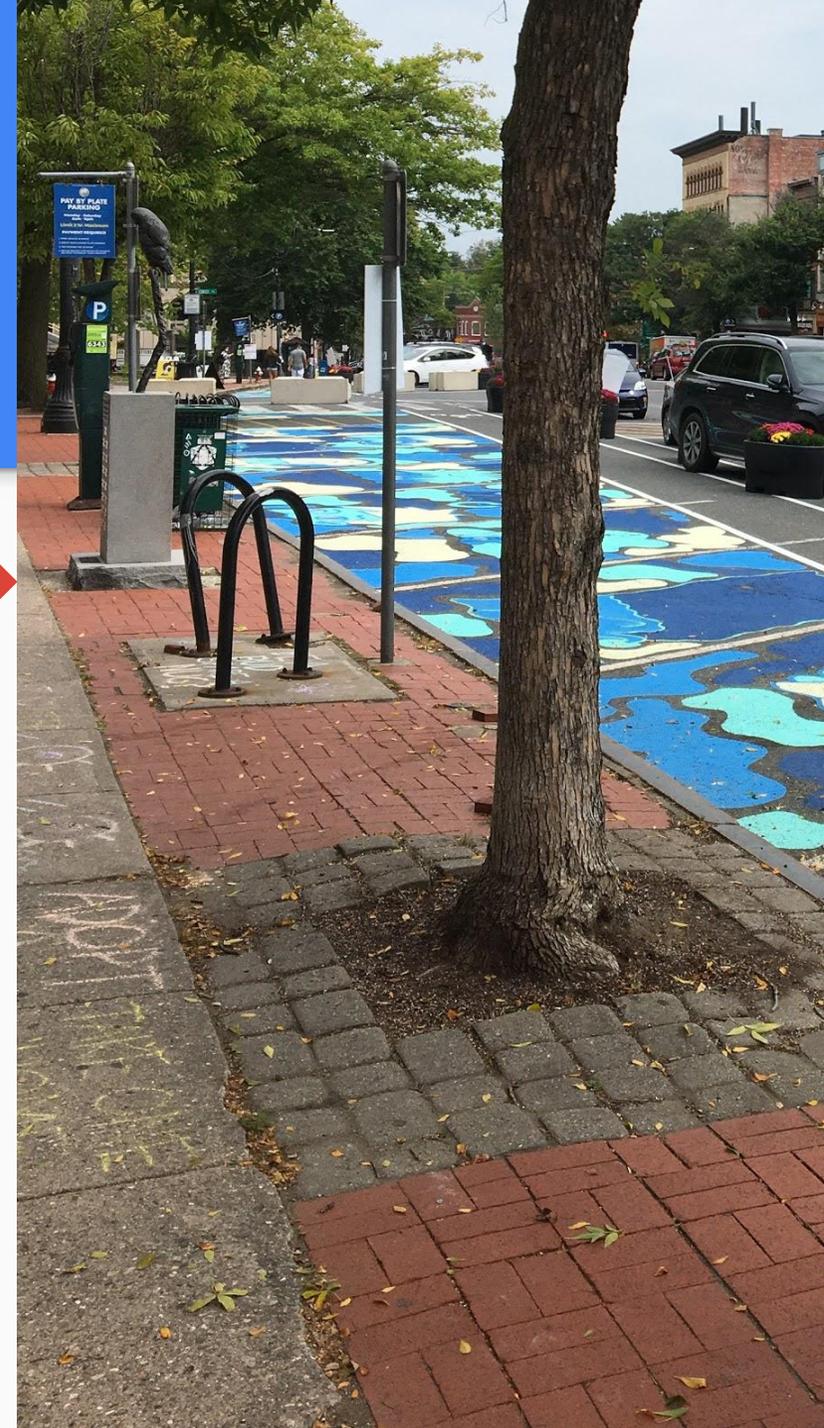
What is social infrastructure?

Examples

Research:

How to study social infrastructure during the pandemic?

Experiences



Inspiration

Sources:

[“Ten Ways Every City Should Respond...”](#).
[StreetsBlogUSA/Kea Wilson, March 31, 2020](#)

[“The Pandemic Has Pushed Aside City Planning Rules”](#)
[New York Times/Emily Badger, July 20, 2020](#)

[“The Recovery Will Happen in Public Spaces”](#)
[Project for Public Spaces/Phil Myrick, May 16, 2020](#)

[“‘Safe Streets’ Are Not Safe for Black Lives”](#),
[CityLab/Destiny Thomas, June 8, 2020](#)

Ten Ways Every City Should Respond to COVID-19 On Its Streets, Compiled by NACTO

The novel coronavirus has rapidly changed the way we use our roads. Cities must respond to the emergency — but they have to do it right.

THE RECOVERY WILL HAPPEN IN PUBLIC SPACE

PHIL MYRICK | MAY 16, 2020

EQUITY & INCLUSION LIGHTER QUICKER CHEAPER STREETS AS PLACES

f 2.9K  

The Pandemic Has Pushed Aside City Planning Rules. But to Whose Benefit?

As bike lanes and cafes sprout on streets, marginalized residents wonder when their priorities will get attention.

CITYLAB

‘Safe Streets’ Are Not Safe for Black Lives

A transportation planner warns pedestrian-friendly street redesigns that happen without diverse public input can end up harming the communities they serve.

Database



Case Study Database



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Case	Country	City, State	US Legacy City	Source (name + link)	"Official" Source (government announcement, website)	Date (policy instituted or published)	Design Treatment (select ONE for each project)	Temporary or Permanent? (select ONE option)	Motivated by COVID-19? (select ONE option)	What (select industry/service of interest)	Why (purpose of effort)	Where (target location)	Who (benefiting)
Example	United States	New Orleans, Louisiana	Yes		City of New Orleans	April, 2019 (concept reveal) April, 2020 (pre-construction meetings)	Other - Bike Lanes	- Permanent	- No	- Pedestrians/Cyclists/Bikers	- To improve the safety of people riding so more people can choose bicycles for transportation	City-wide	Residents
Example	United States	Holyoke, Massachusetts	Yes	City of Holyoke	City of Holyoke/MassDOT	July 15, 2020	Shared Streets - Limited Vehicle Access (street partially closed to allow walking/ biking public to circulate alongside vehicle traffic)	- Permanent	- No	- Residents	- ADA compliance, ped/bike expansion, reduce congestion, update drainage	Connection between West Springfield and Holyoke	Residents/Businesses
Example	United States	St. Louis, Missouri	Yes	St. Louis Post-Dispatch	n/a (see Notes)		Open Streets - Residential Neighborhoods (street partially or fully closed to vehicle traffic in residential areas)	- Permanent	- No	- Residents	- Reduce crime	St. Louis	Residents - d questioned
Example	United States	Fitchburg, Massachusetts	Yes	Sentinel & Enterprise	City of Fitchburg	April 14, 2020	Other - Complete Streets	- Permanent	- No	- Everyone	- Improvements for both cars and people Support revitalization of downtown	Main Street and Boulder Drive	Residents (Businesses)
Example	Mexico	Mexico City	No	Gobierno de México	SEMOMI, SOBSE, SSC	May, 2020	Other - Bike Lanes	- Temporary	- No	- Pedestrians/Cyclists/Bikers	- Make streets safer for bikes and pedestrians	Miguel Hidalgo (subdistrict within Mexico City)	
Example	United States	Detroit, Michigan	Yes	Detroit Greenways Coalition	City of Detroit	2017-2022	Other - Greenway	- Permanent	- No	- Pedestrians/Cyclists/Bikers	- The Joe Louis Greenway will provide community spaces and outdoor activities for all Detroiters	Provide a safe loop around the city	Residents
Example	United States	Flint, Michigan	Yes	CBS Detroit	City of Flint	June 25, 2020	Other - Greenway	- Permanent	- No	- Pedestrians/Cyclists/Bikers	- Complete an 18-mile path connecting the Flint River and Genesee Valley trails	Iron Belle Trail	Residents
Example	United States	Buffalo, New York	Yes		City of Buffalo		Shared Streets - Limited Vehicle Access (street partially closed to allow walking/ biking public to circulate alongside vehicle traffic)	- Permanent	- No	- Residents	- Ongoing program to turn selected streets into Slow Streets	Residential neighborhoods	Residents
Example	United States	Wilmington, Delaware	Yes	Brookings	City of Wilmington	May 1, 2016	Vacant Space - Redesigning Off-Street Parcel (socially-distanced drive-in movies in shopping center parking lot)	- Temporary	- No	- Residents	- Turn tighted area into community space	West center city (downtown district)	Residents
Example	United States	Methuen, Massachusetts	Yes	the LOOP	City of Methuen	July 2, 2020	Vacant Space - Redesigning Off-Street Parcel (socially-distanced drive-in movies in shopping center parking lot)	- Temporary	- Unclear (COVID-adjustments)	- Residents	- Provide free public movie showings	The Loop (shopping center)	Residents - e children
Example	United States	Macon, Georgia	Yes		Macon-Bibb County	May 29, 2020	Other - Reimagine Public Spaces	- Permanent	- Yes	- Pedestrians/Cyclists/Bikers	- To expand a riverside recreational trail into a connected pedestrian-bicycle network through different areas of the city	Ocmulgee Trail network	Residents - c
Example	Canada	Toronto	No		City of Toronto	April 27, 2020	Open Streets - Residential Neighborhoods (street partially or fully closed to vehicle traffic in residential areas)	- Temporary	- Yes	- Residents	- Creates more room on neighbourhood streets and major roads so that people can maintain physical distance while outside	Areas of high population density with limited access to personal outdoor space, providing alternative to congested parks and trails, providing connections to essential services, parks, beaches and other attractions, as well as operational considerations (e.g. traffic volume) and other related information	Residents/Pedestrians/
Example	United States	New Orleans, Louisiana	Yes		City of New Orleans	May 6, 2020	Shared Streets - Limited Vehicle Access (street partially closed to allow walking/ biking public to circulate alongside vehicle traffic)	- Temporary	- Yes	- Residents	- To provide additional space for safe social distancing where crowding occurs	Designated residential district	Residents
Example	United States	Worcester, Massachusetts	Yes	telegram.com	City of Worcester	May 19, 2020	Other - Street Sign Campaign	- Temporary	- Yes	- Everyone	- To provide the community with moments of inspiration, education, and optimism and highlight the relationship between creative expression and mental health, especially relevant during Covid-19	"Throughout" Worcester, including some highway billboards	Residents Commuters Artists
Example	United States	Methuen, Massachusetts	Yes		City of Methuen	June 4, 2020	Other - Outdoor Table Service	- Temporary	- Yes	- Restaurants/Bars	- Assist restaurant re-opening	On-site	Restaurants Customers
Example	United States	Lynn, Massachusetts	Yes		City of Lynn	June 5, 2020	Open Curb - Travel or Parking Lane Conversion (extends public domain onto street or parking space, often protected from adjacent traffic)	- Temporary	- Yes	- Restaurants/Bars	- Guidelines in place for restaurants, cafes, bars to expand operations onto sidewalks or parking spaces	Sidewalk and parking spaces adjacent to restaurant	Restaurants Customers

Table 1: Data collection categories for every example in our database

EXAMPLE	Location: Country, City, State, U.S. Legacy City?
	Meta-data: Source, Official Source, Date?
	Measure: Design Treatment, Temporary or Permanent, Motivated by COVID-19, What, Why, Where?
	Details: Who, By Whom, Community Engagement, Project Status, Process, Outcome
	Analysis: Overall Theme(s)

Sample



Findings (1)

By far, most interventions were installed to benefit restaurants, and then businesses, more generally.



Concrete barriers in Grand Rapids, Michigan
[WOOD, updated June 19, 2020](#)



Outdoor dining in Boston, Massachusetts
[Boston Globe, June 11, 2020](#)



Outdoor dining in Portland, Oregon
[KOMOnews, June 21, 2020](#)

Findings (2)

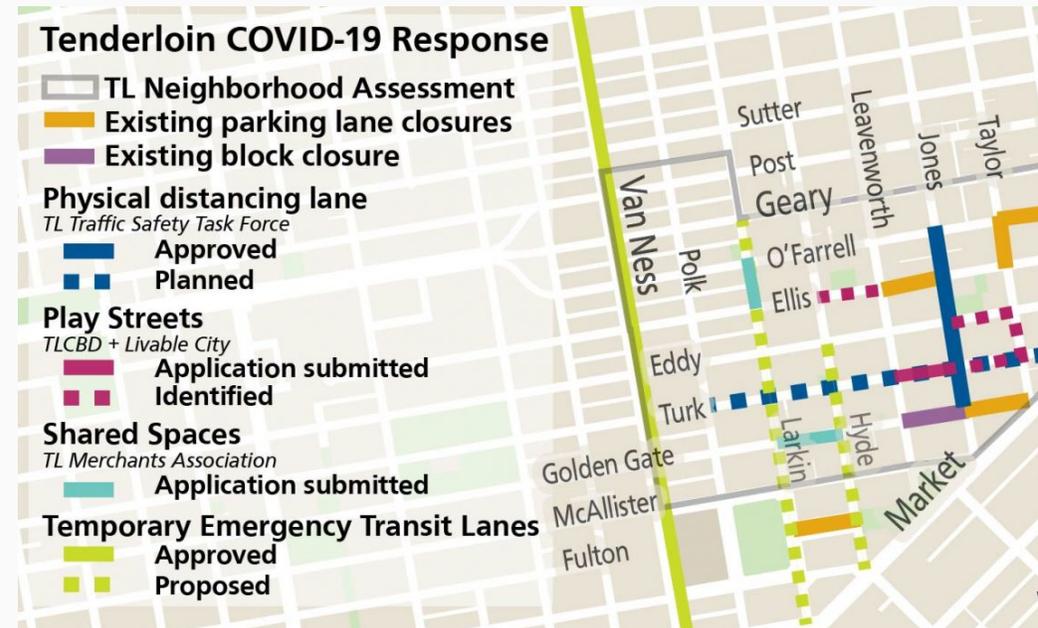
Although less common, 41% of cities made changes to infrastructure that did not directly benefit businesses.



Stay Healthy and Keep it Moving Streets in Seattle, Washington
[Seattle.gov](https://seattle.gov), updated August 14, 2020



Slow Streets in New Orleans, Louisiana
[City of New Orleans](https://www.nola.gov), update July 7, 2020



Play Streets and Shared Spaces in San Francisco, California
[SFMTA](https://www.sfcta.org), accessed September 3, 2020

Findings (3)

Lack of community engagement.

SOHO AL FRESCO.
LET'S GO OUTSIDE...

Donate Now!
f @ t

Good News Press Support What?

WE DID IT. YOU DID IT.

We're delighted to let you know, with your support, our campaign to persuade Westminster City Council to allow the temporary pedestrianisation of Soho this summer has been successful!

This means that our rich tapestry of restaurants, bars, cafés and pubs are 'al fresco' until the end of September.

Come and enjoy Soho as you have never seen it before.

Findings (4)

Almost all interventions were planned as temporary measures at the time of our data collection.

LET'S TALK!

Stay Healthy Streets can only be an asset with input and support from the people who live along and use them. Over the next few weeks, we'll launch outreach to gather input on making them permanent. Our efforts will center race and equity, discuss how to respect the cultural significance of neighborhoods to those that live there and how to evolve the streets into the neighborhood fabric, share the type of treatments we could use to replace the current Street Closed signs, and collect potential locations for expansion. We'll also discuss creating a possible ambassador program, similar to adopting a traffic circle.

We are currently designing the engagement plan and expect to start conversations in the next couple of weeks. We'll look to the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods and community leaders to identify good forums for talking to you, as well as providing online opportunities. In the meantime, you can express your interest by emailing StayHealthyStreets@Seattle.gov .

Question

What will it take to keep these streets and spaces open?

How can they continue to function as social infrastructure instead of reverting to parking lots (with or without snow piles), vacant lots, and traffic thoroughfares?

Promising Signs?

CORONAVIRUS

NYC Open Streets, Open Restaurants to Become Permanent, Year-Round Initiatives

Published September 25, 2020 • Updated on September 25, 2020 at 11:32 pm



News

Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker doubling funding for Shared Streets and Spaces to \$10 million; Program helps businesses adapt outside spaces amid coronavirus

Updated Sep 10, 2020; Posted Sep 10, 2020



Social Infrastructure

Real-Time Research

Practice

Theory:

What is social infrastructure?

Examples

Research:

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Northampton, MA

Northampton, MA

Draw or distraction? Businesses, consumers react to changes downtown



Volunteer Melle Lowenthal, right, of Northampton helps paint a mural designed by artist Sean Greene of Florence onto the pavement on the eastbound side of upper Main Street in Northampton, as part of the Shared Streets and Spaces program modifications. The changes include the addition of bike lanes and parallel parking spaces, separated by a row of planters, to both sides of Main Street. STAFF PHOTO/KEVIN GUTTING

By **GRETA JOCHEM**
Staff Writer
Published: 8/25/2020

NORTHAMPTON — Main Street got a little more colorful over the weekend thanks to volunteers who turned out with paint buckets and brushes to brighten up the pavement with abstract designs. And while many people welcome the sight of street art and more open spaces — the result of a nearly \$200,000 grant awarded to the city by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation’s Shared Streets and Spaces program — others are unhappy about the changes.

Northampton business owners fault process, impact of downtown redesign



Cuauhtli Hernandez, owner of Northampton Jewelers, holds up a computer showing Mayor David Narkewicz and others in a town hall Zoom meeting about the new redesign of Main Street. People gathered outside of Strada Shoes and Essentials on Thursday to listen to and participate in the meeting. STAFF PHOTO/CAROL LOLLIS

By **GRETA JOCHEM**
Staff Writer
Published: 9/10/2020

NORTHAMPTON — Downtown business owners took the opportunity Thursday morning to express their opinions, via a town hall meeting on Zoom, about the temporary redesign of Main Street.

Konstantinos Sierros, an owner of Filos Greek Taverna, stepped up to the computer set up underneath the yellow and white striped awning of Strada Shoes and Essentials, and told the town hall he wanted the changes gone.

“The sooner the better,” he said. Behind him, the group on the sidewalk clapped.

Upper Main Street redesign to be dismantled following mixed feedback



Volunteers were busy helping to paint murals onto the pavement of upper Main Street in Northampton on Saturday, Aug. 22, 2020, as part of the Shared Streets and Spaces program modifications. GAZETTE FILE PHOTO/KEVIN GUTTING

By **GRETA JOCHEM**
Staff Writer
Published: 9/11/2020

NORTHAMPTON — The temporary redesign to upper Main Street will be dismantled early next week, Mayor David Narkewicz announced Friday.

The grant-funded project included narrowing upper Main Street to one traffic lane in each direction to make way for protected bike lanes and expanded open space to bring more people downtown.

“While I am confident that this effort was beginning to have its intended effect, some 55 downtown business owners have expressed opposition to the project and asked that it be removed,” Narkewicz said in a statement Friday.

He continued, “Since supporting our vital local businesses and economic recovery was the central goal of this project, I have decided to act quickly on the mixed and negative feedback the installation has received from downtown businesses. The debate itself is bad for business, and my love for Northampton far outweighs any desire I have to defend this idea.”

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More is less. Verizon



Community... information sign



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WALKER STREET

Various storefront signs and awnings, including a green one with illegible text.

Various storefront signs on the right side of the street.